

FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation in the Territory and Airspace of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Due to ongoing military operations and extremist/militant activity, there is considerable risk to U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Afghanistan at altitudes below Flight Level 330 (FL330), particularly for aircraft on the ground and aircraft operating at lower altitudes during the arrival and departure phases of flight. Additionally, significant areas of high elevation terrain in parts of Afghanistan may create the potential for some threats to U.S. civil aviation to be encountered in those areas at or above FL330. However, to date, there have been no known anti-aircraft fire incidents at or above FL330. For this reason, on 24 December 2017, the FAA published Notice to Airmen KICZ A0031/17, which advised U.S. civil aviation to exercise extreme caution during flight operations when operating in the territory and airspace of Afghanistan, to operate only on established air routes, and to remain at or above FL330 to the maximum extent possible.

The risk to U.S. civil aviation comes from the potential for complex attacks and indirect fire targeting airports/airfields, and from surface-to-air fire during low altitude flight, including while on approach or departure. Airports and airfields in Afghanistan, have frequently been targeted by direct assault and/or indirect fire and are also susceptible to insider threats. Flight operations at airports have been disrupted, and aircraft have been damaged, from indirect rocket or mortar fire attacks, as demonstrated by a late-September 2017 high-profile indirect fire attack on Kabul International Airport (OAKB) when multiple munitions impacted within the airport perimeter and disrupted flight operations. The insider threat risk was demonstrated in early September 2017 by a suicide bomber attack at an entry control point at Bagram Airfield and, in November 2016, by an insider attack that killed four, also at Bagram.

Specifically, aircraft are at risk of encountering small-arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades, anti-aircraft fire and shoulder-fired man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). U.S. and Afghan military aircraft operating at low altitudes have encountered a multitude of anti-aircraft incidents. Although to date MANPADS have only been fired at military aircraft, there is a potential that they may be used against civil aviation with little or no warning. Some MANPADS are capable of reaching a maximum altitude of 25,000 feet above ground level.

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